BENNY, THE BOOK AGENT — — — — By Ellis Parker Butler

THE life of a book agent is far from being the happiest lot and to some persons at some times it is the most miserable, but to Benny Barr it was one continuous round of joy. To a different man the book-agency business is a source of constant, trepid agony. At each fresh door his limbs tremble and he is obliged to goad his reluctant will to meet a fresh and insulting rebuff. Not so Benny. Benny would not have known diffidence if it stared him in the face. His feelings were as tough as raw leather. He was young, brisk, hustling and forceful, and when he was thrown down he did not bruise—he bounced. To Benny each new "prospect" was an opportunity to enjoy a battle. When he managed to force his way into a house and sell a copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" (price, $2, bound in oilcloth, 50 cents down and the balance on delivery), he was happy, and when he attacked the enemy and was solelessly routed he laughed—it was a good joke on Benny.

In dress Benny was inclined to favor advanced styles. He said he liked his clothes to have a little "zipp" to them, and his manners suggested that he did not believe in a young man being too crushed and downcast. His manners were so free from timidity, in fact, that the usual remark after he had left a house was, "Well, he is about the freshest youth I ever did see!"

Benny swung off the train at the suburb of Westcote and made a bee-line for the best residence street. His instinct was almost infallible when residence streets were in question; not once in forty times did he fail to guess correctly, and if he did fail it made no difference to Benny. If, instead of reaching a street of neat suburban homes, he reached first a street of negro shanties, he sold "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" to the colored washerwoman with the same pleasure he would have felt in selling it to the leader of the town's smart set. A sale was a sale, wherever made, but he preferred to see first upon his sale sheet the names of some of the well-known women. It helped in selling to the others.

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THE street Benny reached was a good one, the best in Westcote. It was so highly credentialed that it was known as "Aristocrat's Row," this being a term of satirical import given the street by those who had not the good fortune to be invited to functions like that which had this afternoon filled the parlor of Mrs. Willoughby Jackson.

With his sample copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" under his arm, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and the fire of battle in his eye, Benny entered the first yard and mounted the steps to the front door. He placed his thumb against the bell button and held it there. He could hear the bell jangle inside the house and he kept it jangling. Suddenly the door opened and a maid stood looking at him. She looked but for one instant. She saw the book under Benny's arm.

"We don't want no books!" she said, and the banging door cut the words in two as she shut it in Benny's face. Benny looked at the door a moment and descended the steps. House No. 1, a defeat. He went to house No. 2.

In approaching a house Benny's method never varied. He walked jauntily into the yard, jauntily mounted the steps to the door, leaned the end of his thumb against the bell button and waited developments. It was simple but effective. If he continued to push the button long enough and there was any man, woman or child in the house, someone came to the door.

The second house was larger than the first and more impressive. The door was of mahogany, beautifully polished, and it opened so suddenly that Benny almost fell inside. A maid in apron and cap gave him one glance.

"We don't buy nothing from agents," she said angrily, and slammed the beautiful mahogany door in Benny's face. Benny flicked the ash from his cigarette, tilted his hat to one side, and walked down the steps. He was not perturbed at all. He entered the next yard and jauntily mounted the steps to the front door. He lighted a fresh cigarette before he pushed the bell button, and dropped his stub into the pot of a fan palm that stood on the porch. Then he leaned his thumb against the button and waited. The door opened. A colored maid stood in the doorway. She took one look at Benny.

"Mis' Hilyer ain't home," she said crossly, and the door banged in Benny's face again. He heard the key turn in the lock. He shifted his sample copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" to a resting place under the other arm, looked up and down the street carelessly, and walked down the steps. House No. 3! No matter; there were several thousand houses in Westcote.

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IN the fourth house, as Benny stood on Mrs. Hilyer's porch glancing up and down the street, Mrs. Willoughby Jackson walked nervously from her parlor into her living room, where her niece Eleanor was arranging a tea table to suit her own ideas as to how a tea table should be arranged. In the parlor twenty ladies of the Thursday Afternoon Club chatted and tried to fill in the minutes that were beginning to be irksome. For an hour or more they had been trying to pretend that they did not mind the delay, while Mrs. Willoughby Jackson became more and more nervous.

"Eleanor," said Mrs. Jackson, "do you suppose that man is coming?"

"I don't know, aunt," said her niece. "I have told you before that Reginald Barr is too replete with artistic temperament to suit me. You certainly can't expect an artistic temperament to mind little things like being on time."

"I suppose allowance does have to be made for that," said her aunt nervously. "But it is most annoying. If I had prepared anything else to entertain the ladies—but your mother wrote so positively that he would be here, and would read some of his poems. She said he could easily fill the afternoon."

"Oh, he'd fill it," said Eleanor. "He'll read as long as any one will let him. He'll read as long as he can keep one of his audience in agony. You have to turn out the lights to stop him. And then he'll recite from memory."

"Eleanor! To speak so of such a distinguished man, one of the few true poets our commercial age has produced!" She glanced toward the parlor with annoyance. "But I don't see why he doesn't come. It is so unpleasant to keep repeating excuses."

"Don't fret," said Eleanor. "If he thinks he can get a half dozen women to gurgle over him he'll come if he has to creep."

Mrs. Jackson returned to the parlor with her sweetest smile.

"So sorry our lion is delayed," she purred. "Dear Eleanor assures me he will let no obstacle keep him away. If you would like a few hands of auction until he comes——"

Mrs. Jackson was not as sure as her words indicated. She took from the waist of her gown the letter Eleanor's mother had written her. There were parts that did not have to do with the arrival of Reginald Barr, although they had to do with the wealthy society poet himself. Eleanor's mother referred to the poet as "the sweet poet" and "our dear poet" and "darling Reginald."

"I am quite, quite decided that dear Eleanor shall marry our dear poet," she wrote, "in spite of her foolish fancy for Jack Hollins. Darling Reginald is quite wealthy as well as a famous man, but Eleanor is so stubborn. Of course, I shall not insist until I know your sentiments; your word must be final, for I have such faith in your judgment, dear sister. I think your idea of having the sweet poet come to you and read his dear poems Thursday is admirable. He has promised to be with you at 3, and he knows how much depends on it, so he will not fail you."

Mrs. Jackson, having for the tenth timme confirmed her understanding that 3 o'clock was the hour written, replaced the letter in her bosom. That her sister had written that the decision of Eleanor's aunt would be final did not inflate Mrs. Jackson's pride; she knew that, as the wealthy member of the family, and the one on whom Eleanor's future depended in case Eleanor did not marry money, her decision would be most weighty. Mrs. Jackson accepted this as a matter of course, and accepted it calmly, as she accepted the leadership of Westcote society, and the fact that poets, when invited to read in her parlor, should arrive on time. If Mr. Reginald Barr's automobile skidded and struck the curb midway between New York and Westcote, and lost a wheel (which was exactly what had happened), it had nothing to do with Mrs. Jackson. If Mr. Reginald Barr had an automobile that might skid

"I WILL READ FIRST," HE SAID, TURNING THE PAGES, "A LITTLE THING ENTITLED, 'EGGLESS ANGEL FOOD,' PAGE 456, TOP OF PAGE."

and lose a wheel it was his duty, when invited to read at Mrs. Willoughby Jackson's, to leave New York with an extra wheel, or two extra wheels, or an extra automobile, or a dozen extra automobiles, to hurry him on his way if he had an accident, so that he might arrive at 3 o'clock, as agreed. Therefore, while Reginald Barr sat on the curb and cursed in quite unpoetic terms his chauffeur, Mrs. Jackson glanced again and again at her watch and became more and more provoked.

At this most inauspicious moment Benny Barr, with his sample copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" under his arm, his hat on one side and his cigarette clinging to one side of his lower lip, walked up the steps, crossed Mrs. Willoughby Jackson's veranda and placed his thumb firmly against the bell button.

Instantly the door opened, and Mrs. Jackson's butler (there were but two in Westcote) bent his head reverently.

"Please to step inside, sir," said James. "The ladies are quite ready for you. They have been waiting, in fact, sir."

"Oh, stop! You don't mean it, George!" said Benny, playfully. "Just crazy to see me, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, sir, so you might say. Extremely impatient at least, sir," said James. "Mrs. Jackson has been quite worried because of your non-arrival."

"Has she now!" exclaimed Benny. "Poor old dame, and to think I have kept her waiting! What's this, a tea party? Ex-cuse me!"

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HE turned toward the door but Jammes kindly and with great firmness placed himself between Benny and the exit. James had his own idea of poets and their ways. This one should not escape if he could prevent it. Not until he had been safely delivered to Mrs. Willoughby Jackson, at any rate.

"Now, quit, Augustus," said Benny, good-naturedly. "Let me out. I'll come back after the hoi polloi has scooted. I can't sell a book in a crowd like that."

"I dare say you are right, sir," said James, defending the door, "but Mrs. Jackson would be quite put out if I permitted you to go, I'm sure."

"Well, Bill, you can search me!" exclaimed Benny. "Maybe it is all right, but it looks like some sort of a put-up job to me. Usually I don't have to fight my way out, they help me out. What's the game?"

The explanation might have been too much for James, but he was not called upon to make it. Mrs. Willoughby Jackson had heard the voices in the hall and advanced upon Benny in the full splendor of her regalia, from lorgnette to bronze silk stockings.

"My dear Mr. Barr!" she cried, holding out her hand. "I am so relieved. I had begun to fear you were going to fail us."

"Say, now," said Benny, "just wait a minute. Let me get this straight. What is the joke? Who are these dames and for what am I supposed to be expected for?"

"Ah! poetic eccentricities!" said Mrs. Willoughby Jackson playfully. "But I see you have brought your book, so we quite understand each other."

"Oh, do we?" said Benny. "I know, this is a cooking class. Am I right?"

"Now, please!" said Mrs. Willoughby Jackson. "James, will you take Mr. Barr's hat? I am, of course," she added to Benny, "Mrs. Willoughby Jackson, Eleanor's aunt, and now I will introduce you to the ladies of the Thursday Afternoon Club."

"Eleanor's aunt!" said Benny to himself. "That doesn't sound so bad. Wonder who Eleanor is. Wonder who I am. Well, it will do no harm to have a gilt-edge introduction to some of Westcote's swellest. Maybe I can pull off a few sales," and he entered the parlor behind Mrs. Willoughby Jackson.

"Ladies," said Mrs. Jackson in her best club voice, "this is Mr. Barr whom we have been awaiting with such genuine impatience. Mr. Barr, Mrs. Longworthy, our vice president. Miss Simms, our secretary. Mrs. Dahlgren, our treasurer."

Over each extended hand, as he grasped it (they extend the hand in Westcote, particularly to celebrated poets), Benny bowed and uttered a "Glad to meet you."

Eleanor, hearing, came to the door and looked into the parlor. She gasped as she saw Mrs. Willoughby Jackson introducing some unknown man as Mr. Barr, the poet. She was tempted to cry out, but the look of pride on the face of her aunt warned her that to heap ridicule on that queenly lady by announcing this interloper would be a most unkind and shocking thing. She drew back and pressed her hands to her temples, thinking, and each moment Benny, the book agent, was introduced to another of Westcote's smart set.

"And of course you know Eleanor," said Mrs. Willoughby Jackson pleasantly. Eleanor grasped one of the portieres with a trembling hand and looked full into Benny's twinkling eyes.

"Oh, sure!" said Benny. "Of course! Why not?"

Eleanor drew back. Then, suddenly, she put out her hand and touched her aunt's arm.

"Aunt!" she whispered, "may I speak to this—this person alone? Just one minute, aunt? Please!"

"Just one minute!" said Mrs. Willoughby Jackson in her playfulest manner. "We are all waiting for you, Mr. Barr, you know."

Benny passed between the portieres.

Come over here," said Eleanor. "Pretend you want tea. Now, who are you and what do you mean by all this?"

She poured a cup for Benny and dropped no one knows how many lumps in it.

"Just what I was going to ask you," said Benny. "Who am I? What's all the welcome-home stuff for?"

"I asked you who you were," said Eleanor coldly. "Why are you here imposing on my aunt? Unless you answer I will have you thrown out at once. Did Reginald send you?"

"Question one: Answer, Ben Barr, book agent, selling the swellest little cook book that was ever put on the market for $2," answered Benny. "Question two: Answer, who is imposing? Question three: Answer, who is Reginald?"

"I don't understand," said Eleanor.

"You can search Benny," he said, sipping the tea. "I come to the door to sell an 'Aunt Jane.' George Augustus grabs me and hands me over to the swell dame. The swell dame passes me along the line and shoves me in here. That's all I know. Now, who am I supposed to be? And how do I get out of here? How about little Ben making a quick getaway out of one of these windows?"

Eleanor rested her cheeck on her hand and looked at Benny.

"My aunt thinks you are Reginald Barr, the poet," she said thoughtfully. "She has been expecting him to read to the ladies. She has mistaken you for him. I wonder——"

"So do I," said Benny. "What's your wonder?"

"I wonder if——" said Eleanor slowly. "Oh, Jack!"

Benny turned and saw a husky young fellow at the hall door.

"Here is where I get tossed through a perfectly good window pane," he said. "My only request is that I am thrown feet first, glass does cut the scalp so."

"No, sit still!" said Eleanor. "Jack, come here. Something awful has happened. Aunt has mistaken this man for Reggy Barr."

"Quite a natural mistake, but hard on our friend here," grinned Jack.

"No, listen!" urged Eleanor. "She really thinks this gentleman is Reggy. She's going to have him read his poems to the ladies. She has introduced him to all of them, and, Jack——"

"Yes, Nellie?"

"You know that mother will do as aunt advises, about Reggy—about my marriage. I was wondering——"

"Go ahead!"

"This gentleman looks like such a pleasant man," said Eleanor smiling on Benny. "I was wondering, if aunt happened to get very disgusted with—with whoever she thought was Reggy, if that wouldn't be just what we wanted? If Reggy did not turn up this afternoon at all, Jack, and this gentleman——"

"Named Benny Barr," said Benny grinning. "I'm game! Lead me to it!"

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"OF course, some one would have to see that if Reggy came he did not get in," said Elanor, "and Mr. Benny Barr would have to be almost more unpleasant than I think he can be——"

"I'll take care of Reggy," said Jack promptly. "I'll stand outside and lead him astray if I have to do it with an ax."

"And you don't know until you see me what an awful cut-up I am," said Benny. "But where do I get off? I'm cast to queer about twenty sales of 'Aunt Jane's Cook Book' at two dollars per, and what do I get out of it?"

"I'll take care of that," said Jack promptly. "When Nellie and I clasp hands we'll need about twenty copies of a first-class cook book, won't we, Eleanor?"

"Hurry!" whispered Eleanor, "aunt is coming." Jack hurried from the room. "And now, dear Reginald," said Eleanor, emphasizing the name, "I must let you go. Aunt will want you."

"If you are ready, please!" said Mrs. Willoghby Jackson. "the ladies have finished a hand and are ready to hear your dear poems, Mr. Barr."

"Sure! Sure!" said Benny. "That is what I am here for, isn't it? Anything to please the dames—that's my motto! Lead me to it."

"You see I have placed a stand here for you," said Mrs. Jackson as she led Bunny into the parlor. "And a glass of water. Readers so often wish a sip of water in a warm room."

"A nice little rye highball goes better with me," said Benny cheerfully. "Water is all right in its place. You know that good old one: 'Water? Water?' says the fellow. "Let me see, what is water? I'm sure I know what that word means. Oh, yes, I remember. It's the stuff they put under bridges.' Good one, hey?"

Mrs. Jackson smiled a sickly smile. She glanced nervously at the other ladies. Several faces bore a shocked look.

"I was just telling Mrs. Jackson a little joke," said Benny easily as he took his place behind the little stand. "There's another I'll tell the whole crowd if you don't mind hearing one that is just a little rich. There was a fellow who——"

"Please!" said Mrs. Jackson nervously. "If you will just read a few of your poems, Mr. Barr."

"Why, 'soitenly' as the fellow says," said Benny. "Just thought you might like to hear a real zipper of a story. But you are right. You're right! It is no sort of story to tell in a crowd like this. I'll tell you when we are alone, after the crowd goes. Now, the first little thing I'll read—May I have a chair?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Jackson. "James, a chair for Mr. Barr."

"Always like to sit when I read," said Benny. "It is so formal to stand around and read. Thanks, James. I will begin the entertainment by reading——"

He stopped short and wiggled his shoulders.

"Let's be comfortable, what say?" he said. "Just like a nice little party, shall we? Sort of Bohemian. You see," he explained seriously, "this coat is so infernally tight under the arms I can't feel like a poet in it. I feel like a clothing-store dummy, size 36 stout, in a 36 slim. Nothing gags the divine afflatus like being choked under the arms. You don't mind my laying aside my coat?"

"If you feel it is quite necessary," said Mrs. Jackson coldly. "In the meanwhile the ladies are waiting for you to begin."

"Thanks, awfully," said Benny, and he drew off his coat and tossed it carelessly to James, revealing a pair of shirt sleeves of striking red and white stripes. "And you look out you don't pinch my cigarettes, Augustus," he threatened James. "I know how many are in the box. Now, if the fat lady in the corner will please turn off her conversation a few minutes. This is supposed to be a solo and not a duet."

Mrs. Jackson frowned and the stout lady turned very red. Benny settled himself low in the chair James had provided and threw one knee comfortably over one arm of it. He ran his fingers through his hair, smiled at his audience and opened his book. He glared at it, stuck his face close to the pages, turned the book over.

"Somebody has handed me the double cross," he said. "Some guy has pinched by tome and handed me a lemon."

"What is wrong?" asked Mrs. Jackson, rustling up from the front row of chairs.

"Somebody pinched my poems and gave me a cook book," said Benny. "'Aunt Jane's Cook Book,'" he read. "'Two thousand choice recipes for the kitchen and the chafing dish. Compiled by twenty-four of America's most noted culinary artists. Price $2 net.' Well, no matter! It will all be the same in a thousand years."

"But it does matter!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson, vigorously.

"Not a bit!" said Benny. "I can read this just as well. Good home stuff, free from objectionable features. I will read first," he said, turning the pages, "a little thing entitled 'Eggless Angel Food,' page 456, top of the page."

"Please, Mr. Barr!" said Mrs. Jackson, pleadingly.

"Now, here!" said Benny. "Who is doing this reading, you or me? If you are, go ahead and read. I don't care. You don't think I enjoy coming out here in the woods and reading to a lot of—of ladies, do you? Let me read what I want to. Honest, I get so tired reading those same old poems over and over that this will be a pleasure. 'Eggless Angel Food. Take one cup of butter and mix well with——'"

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MRS. JACKSON stepped back and clasped and unclasped her hands nervously while Benny read the recipe from start to finish. He kept time with the words by swinging his foot back and forth as it hung over the arm of the chair. He ended and turned over a few pages.

"The next number on the program," said Benny, "is 'A Digestible Welsh Rabbit.' Clarence, before I dip into this little gem, suppose you hand me a cigarette."

Mrs. Jackson made a gesture of hopeless despair and James brought Benny a cigarette and a light.

"Um!" said Benny, drawing a lungful of smoke, and he threw his other knee over the chair arm beside its fellow. Thus comfortably arranged, he rested his head on the opposite arm and held the book aloft. "'A Digestible Welsh Rabbit,'" he read. "'Take one pound of fresh cheese and slice into straws. Put half a bottle of beer'—that sounds good to me—'into the chafing dish, and when well heated add one teaspoonful of salt one mustard spoonful of cayenne——'"

Benny raised his head and looked at Eleanor.

"Don't bother about me, kid," he said. "I like these. This is some book. Things in this book I never imagined in my life."

"But you know, Reginald," said Eleanor, "you came out to read your own poems to the ladies. I'm sure they don't care to hear cooking recipes."

"Is that so!" said Benny. "And I suppose it don't make any difference what I like to read, does it? Oh, well, have it your own way! Bring on the book. We will now have a few minutes' recess while the book is being brought. And while we are waiting, what is the matter with letting George William pass the sandwiches?"

"Just a little later" said Mrs. Jackson.

"But, I'm hungry," said Benny, sitting upright.

"When you have read," said Mrs. Jackson, "we will adjourn to the other room, all of us."

"When I have read," said Benny, mockingly. "That's fine for you. You didn't have to scoot out from town on an empty stomach. But think of poor me! You don't care whether I drop dead in the middle of a verse or not. I can read and starve. That's always the way. If I was some poor guy you'd hand me $25 for an afternoon's work like this, and feed me before you trotted me out, but just because I have a bank roll it's 'No food for Reggy!' Everywhere I go it is the same way. Kick if I want my coat off; kick if I sit in a chair; kick all the time. And now all I ask for is a sandwich."

"James," said Mrs. Jackson, fiercely, "give him a sandwich."

"Oh, make it half a dozen, James!" said Benny, and James made it half a dozen, bringing them on a delicate white-and-gold plate and placing them on the stand at Benny's side. He took one of the sandwiches and dvoured it greedily and washed it down with a swig of water. Eleanor came with "Ashes of Thistles," Mr. Reginald Barr's celebrated book of poems.

"You are overdoing it," she whispered.

"Am I?" whispered Benny, and he took the book and a sandwich and arose. He opened the book, smiled at Mrs. Jackson, took a large bite of sandwich and looked at his audience.

"Um humf mum humf hum hum humf," he mumbled through the sandwich.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Jackson, "if you either ate first or read first the ladies would have more enjoyment from the reading."

Benny took another bite of sandwich.

"I hummumf mum mummyhumf humf humf," he said, pleasantly and swallowed. "So I will read first 'The Fight of the Crane,' which," and he took another bite of sandwich, "humf mum hum mummummumf."

"It is one of his favorites," explained Eleanor.

"Mum humf um mum humf," Benny began, and plunged into the graceful verses of the poet:

"Deep azure the (bite of sandwich) humpfum um mumf mum mumf,
Mummum humpfum mum humfum mumf,
Mumf of the gold in the far, far (bite of sandwich) humf
Um mum humf um mum humf ummum West."

Benny paused to take a drink and another bite, but two of the ladies in the far corner arose, drawing their light wraps over their shoulders. They turned, looking on their chairs for dropped gloves or handkerchiefs—a sure sign they were leaving, and Mrs. Jackson's face turned crimson. She put her hand on Benny's arm just as he was attacking the second verse of the poem. He looked around with surprise.

"Thank you, Mr. Barr," she said coldly, "I think we will end the reading here. We are extremely" (and what sarcasm she threw into the words!) "grateful for your kindness. I am sure we have all enjoyed it immensely. James, Mr. Barr's hat, please, and be sure he has all his cigarettes returned to him."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Benny. "Oh, if they don't want to hear me I don't care! I only came out to oblige, But before I go, I must tell you that story. Now, there was a fellow——"

"James!" said Mrs. Jackson peremptorily, "Mr. Barr's hat!"

Benny picked up his sample copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" and tucked it under his arm.

"Here's where I get off," he said, and turned to the door. James stood with his head held extremely stiff and high. He opened the door silently and stood back while Benny passed out. "So long, Algernon Augustus," said Benny pleasantly, and he walked down the steps whistling.

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HALF way down the block he met Jack, leaning against a fence, with his arms caught over the pickets.

"How did you make out?" asked Jack.

"Fine!" said Benny. "She hates me worse than poison. And how did you?"

"Well, I had to struggle with him," said Jack, grinning. "I had to shake a finger at him and say 'Naughty, naughty!' before he would believe he had made a mistake of a week in the date. He's coming out next Thursday."

"Now this," said Benny, opening his sample copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book," is one of the best cook books ever compiled. The price is only $2 a copy——"

Jack laughed.

"How many do I have to take to square myself?" he asked.

"We spoke of twenty," said Benny.

"Twenty it is then," said Jack, but Benny shook his head.

"Make it one," he said. "A man ought to put in some time helping a pair like you and Eleanor—excuse my using her front name, it's the only one I know. Make it one copy. I never sold many of those smart set people anyway. I'm glad to help out."

So Benny went on down the street. He had time to sell a few more copies of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book" before dinner. Jack, as was natural enough, went back to Mrs. Willoughby Jackson's, and her reception, before she suggested that Eleanor might be found at the tea table, was quite warm and welcoming.

"But, my dear," Eleanor's mother wrote a few days later to Mrs. Willoughby Jackson, "you are quite wrong. You have harbored an imposter. Dear Reginald never reached your house. He was delayed and deceived. I beg of you to withhold your final decision until you have seen Reginald and have heard him read his beautiful poems."

Mrs. Jackson read the letter for the third time as she sat at her desk. Then she dipped her pen in her ink and wrote to her sister.

"It may be as you say," she wrote, "about Reginald never having reached my house. Be that as it may, Eleanor shall never marry your Reginald Barr with my approval. I have formed an unchangeable opinion of poets. The man who read at my house Thursday may not have been your precious Reginald, but he might have been, and that is enough for me!"

And, that being the sort of woman Mrs. Willoughby Jackson was, it came about quite naturally that one of the wedding presents Jack Hollins gave his bride was a copy of "Aunt Jane's Cook Book."

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Trials of a Scoutmaster

BY VIN.

THE recently printed statistics of the world-wide Scout and Cub movement for boys are bound to set even the ordinary boyless reader to thinking. The Scouts have come to stay, for as soon as one batch puts on long trousers and gives away its Scout togs to its younger brothers, the new generation is right there to carry on in all the intoxicating thrill of novelty.

Few adults can look back on anything that resembled the satisfactory work and play of scoutcraft; there were a few Ernest Thompson-Seton Indians dancing about their campfires; there were a certain number of cadet corps, boys' brigades, boys' bands, boys' camps and municipal clubs for the poor boys of the slums. Social settlements were a fad with

"HIS GOOD WORK FOR ONE DAY HAD BEEN TO LACE MOTHER'S SHOES."

a small slice of the well-to-do, and a not enormous clientele of the sometimes amused and bamboozling poor. But there were not Boy Scouts of America until about eleven years ago. The writer happens to know some of the first official scouts who enrolled in the U. S. A. under their delightful master, a young Englishman, F. John Romanes, son of the Oxonian scientist, and now an army officer.

Yesterday I was talking with an old friend who has done very well at the remarkably difficult task of running the first and only scout troop in a midwest town of 1,500 inhabitants, one of those places that seemingly has no water, no trees, no flowers and no anything, yet breeds strong and prosperous citizens, just the same. Said my friend in effect:

"We have both Scouts and Wolf Cubs. The latter organization, for boys under the Scout age of twelve, is successful in England, but has never been a go in this country. Some of my Cubs are no larger than a cricket. Just before I left for Washington one of them called to me across the street:

"'I couldn't think of no good turn yesterday, but I done two today.'

"A larger Cub put this casuistical question: 'If I go to the picture show tonight and tell my mother about it when I get home, will that be a good turn?'

The same boy, not clear as to the meaning of the good turn, handed in this written list:

"'On Saturday I sold papers.

"'On Monday I took a bath.

"'On Sunday I went to Sunday school.

"'On Thursday I stade at home and helped my mother wash.

"'On Friday I went to school.

"'On Wednesday I went to town for one of my nabors.'

"My nabors" is an expression more commendable than 'our nabors.'

"Here is the hurry-up notation of a fourteen-year-old Scout: 'I have shoveled lot of snow this week and took care of my kid brother for a while.'

"Another boy of the same age put down some unintentional free verse that any editor would accept:

"'Kind deeds.

"'I showed a lady how to start her car.

"'I got one of our neighbor's milk.

"'I got the other neighbor's mail.

"'I took Mr. Cyprian (a man just out of hospital) over to town in our car.

"'I got our neighbor's coal, she offered me some money, but I did not take any money.'

"A larger boy wrote to me: 'On the way home I found a black handbag and there was quite a little money in it. I returned it and received no pay for it. This is my good turn.'

"From a twelve-year-old:

"'Monday, watered a thirsty horse and cow; Tuesday, fed hungry chickens; Wednesday, helped a man unhitch and water a team of horses; Thursday, fed a hungry colt and curried it; Friday, helped a boy get a play turtle which some one larger than he had took. This is a picture of the turtle. Another, also fed a stray kitten.'"

"One of the largest Scouts told me that he had laced mother's shoes.' As the mother in question has a distinct tendency toward embonpoint, the turn was good.

"A magnificent-looking youngster (according to our local adaptation of the English rules) to tie only three knots. Recently a cub asked, "Will it be all right if I tie a four-in-hand in my necktie?"

Another cub proudly showed the scoutmaster the correct knot to arrange for the hanging of a criminal. "How in the world did you learn that?" was inquired.

"Oh, my father teached me. He knows almost everything."

There are times when the scoutmaster wishes that boys were not barometers. On some nights, with no apparent reason, everything goes off like a copy of the English "Boys' Own Paper." At other meetings, a diabolical restlessness is noticeable, even in the model troopers of high degree. The gavel and the imperative have to be employed in order that master may maintain his amusing reputation for being the only man in town who can make a bunch of boys behave.

How different is a boy alone from a boy with other boys! The little Dr. Jekyll of church or the school-room may be the little Mr. Hyde of the home, or vice versa.

A Vanishing River.

ONE of the most remarkable rivers in the world flows through the northern part of Mexico. It borders the great Mexican desert and to reach it one need travel only one day's journey on horseback from the Rio Grande, which marks the southern boundary of the United States in that region. The extraordinary river in question has its source in the hills bordering the desert. It flows southward for some twenty miles as smoothly as any well behaved river, but, suddenly, as it flows between high bluffs, it becomes whirling rapids—rapids so strong and so dangerous that no man has ever been brave enough to attempt to cross the rushing waters.

One follows the rapids, as he walks along the bluff on either side, for about two miles, and then that river vanishes utterly. Hence the name Vanishing river. It disappears suddenly, mysteriously, completely, into the earth itself, and not into a cave, as one would suppose. Scientists have tried in vain to ascertain where that river goes; all that they have yet announced as the result of their explorations is that the river seems to drop sheer into the earth, as over the brink of a bottomless abyss, and that this Vanishing river is the most amazing body of water known to geographers.

Yolk Pigment.

IT is reported that a chemist abroad has succeeded in isolating the yellow pigment of the yolk of egg in a crystalline state, and finds that it is closely related to the xanthophyl of leaves. This is regarded as an important scientific discovery. To extract four grams of crude pigment the investigator employed the yolks of no less than 6,000 eggs. The crystallized pigment is known as lutein.

Famous Trees of Washington

THE SHEPHERD-WASHINGTON ELM.

The Shepherd-Washington Elm.

THE Shepherd-Washington Elm is in the northeast corner of the Botanic Garden, just east of the Crittenden Oak.

When an old tree planted by George Washington had to be cut to make room for enlarging the Capitol, Superintendent Wm. R. Smith of the Botanic Garden was successful in growing from it several scions. One of these was planted by Senator Beck and another, Mr. Smith planted, in honor of Alexander Robie Shepherd, who, more than any other man, is responsible for Washington as the "City Beautiful."

It is hard to imagine Washington as it was in 1870. It was ugly, muddy, an overgrown town, or rather a group of villages connected by straggling, hilly roads, without pavements or good sidewalks. Washington was Alexander Shepherd's home town. He had lived here year in and year out, and had become thoroughly out of patience with the way in which Congress treated every problem of city betterment. He had long contended that Washington, as the capital of the United States, was raised immeasurably above every other city in the land. He argued that Congress should be generous in providing for its improvement and adornment.

Through President Grant's friendship, Shepherd was influential in inaugurating a new form of government in which a board of public works held important place. Shepherd himself was appointed chairman, and he began the boldest kind of expenditure. His first act was to secure a District bond issue for $6,000,000 providing for a grand scheme of improvements. In three years, under his dictatorial rule, 207 miles of smooth sidewalks were laid and 118 miles of asphalt roadway were constructed. Shepherd planted 10,000 new shade trees and mapped out new parks by the score. From chairman of the board of public works he become governor. With a feverish energy Governor Shepherd worked and wrought a miracle in the changed appearance of Washington.

The cost was tremendous. The taxpayers from one end of the country to the other arose in their wrath. They were enraged. The storm broke. Governor Shepherd left the District of Columbia $21,000,000 in debt. Yet the work was done, and well done. The neglected work of seventy years crowded in a brief three.

Shepherd's plans for making Washington attractive have ripened matured. Washington grows beautiful every year, and we back with gratitude to Alexander ble Shepherd who, in spite of position, criticism and calumny, the boldness, energy and fearless to lead the way.

Such was the man and such the complishments in honor of which young elm was planted and yet the early summer of this year, the Shepherd Elm was apparently lost tree. It had been moved, where to no one in all Washington seemed to know.

When the Grant monument was cated by the east gate of the Botanic Garden in 1908, a number of ha some trees planted by distinguished people had to be sacrificed. Many jected to having any of the trees cut; they objected so strenuously to a public hearing was called which resulted in a decision to move three trees considered most important. The trees moved were the Crittenden Oak, the Beck Elm and the Shepherd Elm.

Everybody knew where the Crittenden Oak was placed. It was the first tree moved and crowds watched its progress. The Beck Elm went to the south side of the garden and did. It never came to life after it was moved. Evidently the Shepherd Elm was the last tree moved, and by the time people had lost interest, two months this summer, thirty years after the tree was moved, it seemed lost beyond recall. Mr. Smith and his assistant were both dead and there was no record.

At last the writer found a gardener who said he was working in the Botanic Garden when the trees were moved, but he didn't know where the Shepherd Elm was. He led him through the third degree:

"There were three trees moved?"

"Yes."

"We know where the Crittenden Oak is?"

"Yes."

"We know where the Beck Elm went. It died."

"Yes."

"Well, there was a third tree. Do you know where the third tree is?"

"Oh, yes. I know where that is. It's over here beside the Crittenden Oak."

We went over beside the Crittenden Oak, and there was the slender graceful young elm, which a few months before I had picked out as a possible Shepherd Elm. The Shepherd Elm was found! It was no longer a lost tree! Yet in a few months and all knowledge of it would have passed. What stronger argument do we need for marking trees?

ISABEL SEWALL HUNTER.

Scientist Makes a Trip to Study Indian Stone Wor

JOHN L. BAER, acting curator of archeology in place of Neil M. Judd, has left his cheery office on the third floor of the National Museum to visit a prehistoric Indian workshop on the Island of Peach Blossom, near Delta, Pa. For a number of years Mr. Baer has made a special study of Indian banner stones. He has picked them up in fields, on the shores of lakes and rivers, by huge ledges—in fact, wherever ancient Indian tribes made their dwellings.

No one knows, not even present Indian tribes, what was the particular

JOHN L. BAER,
Who has gone to study the ancient banner stones of the Indians of Pennsylvania.
(Bachrach photo.)

significance of these remarkable emblems that were so carefully and patiently carved out of larger stones by the tedious process of pecking and polishing. In their special case on the second floor of the museum, one finds them made in many integesting shapes, and of plain banded slate, of sandstone, quartzite, greenstone, granite and chalcedony. Some of them resemble butterflies, some are shaped like crescents, a large number remind one of double-edged axes. Whatever the size or shape, the center of all the finished stones is thicker than the edges and has a hole extending through horizontally, as the implement were intended to fitted with a handle.

Probably these banner stones w in use several thousand years Some scientific men have conten that they typified the butterfly; s that they represented bird fli and others think they resemble tail of a whale, inasmuch as whale was considered a great p affording the savage an abund supply of food. The most commo accepted theory is that they were tirely emblematic, being used in ligious ceremonies, and, as their n indicates, were carried on long h dles, like banners or flags.

The Eskimos have an elabo ceremony connected with the wh hunt, in which they use symbolic vices of ivory, which are similar certain respects to some types of b ner stones.

When choosing material for th stones the Indian appears to h preferred bright, clear varieties w well defined bands, entirely differ specimens from those which he m eled into utility tools, such as a and pestles. Patient and long-c tinued pecking and rubbing brou out the artistic and fancy sha while drilling the hole for the ha necessitated the greatest caution prevent breaking the delicate wi particularly if he were fashionin "butterfly" or thin-winged varlety emblem. The high polish on many the stones is an especial indicatio the reverence in which they w held by their makers.

Few specimens of these stones found west of the Mississippi ri but many of the eastern states represented in the museum collect

On an island in the Susquehanna river below Columbia, Pa., is a le of slate to which the Indians w wont to resort for materials for banner stones of that vicinity, around this locality have been fo many relics of their labor. While is away Mr. Baer will also study dian heiroglyphics which have b discovered on rocks near Bald Fr Md., also on the Susquehanna rive

Skinless Furs.

A French chemist has invented ingenious process for mak furs moth-proof. First, on a fram a shallow pan, he stretches the s with the fur up, and pours in eno water to cover it. He puts the in a refrigerating chamber, and k it there until the water is fr solid. Next, he takes out the c of ice and from the bottom saws layer that contains the skin. T he melts the bottom of the cake is left, and when the lower end the fur protrude a little, he pours a solution of rubber, layer by la until the coating is of the requ thickness. The coating is flex When the rest of the ice has mel the fur is practically finished. inventor says that except for the that it is proof against the attack insects, it is exactly like natural The skin is sold as leather.